

On the 22nd. September, the guns were again advanced to Bellewaarde Ridge, and so thick was the mud that dragropes and men were mostly employed, horses being impracticable. These days were full of hard work for the battery, no man was spared. The gunners were having a very difficult time, little sleep, and endless toil, and one by one their old mates were being taken from them. The drivers had little better, the nightly trips to the gun positions on the "packs" were nightmares! Myriads of muddy shell holes under foot. Bombing machines overhead, and on all sides the screeching of 4.2's and 5.9's. The total number of rounds fired by the batteries of the 7th. and 8th. Brigades for the period from 12th. till 27th. September was 153,456 rounds.

At 60'Clock on the morning of the 4th. October, 1917, the 3rd. stage of the Battle of Ypres commenced, the guns being situated on Frezenberg Ridge, and at 10.55.p.m. the batteries were instructed to cease firing.

On the 6th. the batteries again moved forward to Borry Farm near Sonnebeke. The positions were reconnoitred by Major T. James (25th.) and Major Playfair (26th.) Owing to the shell-torn state of the country, great difficulty was experienced in moving the guns, and rain also aggravated the difficulties. Here pill boxes afforded cover for a few, though the major portion of the personnel had to find shelter in shell holes and trenches. Group headquarters also moved forward and occupied a pill box in order to establish better communications with the batteries.

On the 7th. the weather was very bad and the enemy succeeded in causing many casualties along the Ypres-Zonnebeke Road, as well as disorganising the traffic, but the engineers were successful in their efforts to make the road passable the same day. Owing to the number of casualties to our guns, the brigade was forced to obtain the loan of nine 18-pounders and four 4.5" Hows. from the 66th. Division, and they were brought into action on the 7th. The enemy on Passchendaele Ridge was all this time active, and several guns were put out of action, but he again directed much attention to the Main Road, realising, doubtless, that if he made that impassable, supplies would be cut off from the batteries, as no alternative road was possible of preparation.

On the 8th. at 7.30.a.m. the 4th. stage of the Battle of Ypres opened, and shortly after 8 O'Clock, Lt. Rutledge (107th.) who was going over with the infantry was killed, and at 9.45 it was stated that all objectives had been gained.

On the 10th. October, hostile artillery fire was above normal, with the result that the rather long list of battery casualties was increased. Guns were also reported among the casualties. On account of the severe shelling undergone by the group in this sector, 48 trench mortar personnel were posted to the group for duty as gunners, but as these men were only partially trained, the work and responsibility of the gunners was only relieved to a small extent.

At 5.25. on the morning of the 12th. the 5th. stage of the great battle was begun, but this stage proved unsuccessful, one of the great difficulties being the amount of mud and water. The attacking parties often being waist high in water.

During this period, the batteries were subjected to a great shelling, resulting in a large number of casualties. The numbers of gun layers and telephonists were, by this time, depleted to such an extent, that in case of several batteries, only two or three were left. It was impossible to fill these responsible positions by partially trained men, and as a consequence, it was necessary for the highly trained specialists to do greatly increased work. In some batteries, drivers were doing work as signallers and as gunners, and in many instances, officers were acting as gun layers in the endeavour to keep all guns in action. Throughout the whole operation, drivers were almost continuously at work in the most difficult and dangerous task of packing ammunition to the guns. In no case however, was it necessary to report that the group could not maintain the quantity of ammunition which it was ordered should be up at the guns.

Drivers and gunners were alike careless of danger, being concerned only in maintaining as many guns as possible of the batteries in action.

On the 20th. the enemy subjected the battery positions to a tremendous bombardment, with 8", 5.9", 4.2" and 77in. in H.E. Shells rained at the rate of at least 60 per minute for approximately an hour. A large quantity of ammunition was destroyed, but the casualties were light, due largely, to the ingenuity of the men in finding cover in the pill boxes captured from the enemy in the previous attack.

As a result of this shooting and the bad weather, the ground in the vicinity of the batteries was rendered a quagmire, while the roads in the rear of the positions were almost totally destroyed. The shell holes had rapidly filled with water, and the guns appeared as though they rested on little islands.